

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CLOTHING - 1

■ Climate and clothing

Because Egypt's desert climate was hot most of the year, clothing was designed for comfort in the heat, protection from the sun, cleanliness, and modesty. Most Egyptians wore linen clothes, although other materials, particularly woolens, were also used. The *sem* priest wore an entire leopard pelt over one shoulder as part of his ceremonial wear. Slashed gazelle skin was used for soldiers' and laborers' loincloths. Bronze scales were added to leather to make a kind of armor.

■ Linen

Linen was made from flax. The youngest shoots made the finest, softest fabric—called "royal." A shawl found in Tutankhamon's tomb was of such fine linen it took about nine months of eleven-hour days to complete it. Half-grown shoots were used to make the heavier grades of linen—"fine thin," "thin cloth," and "smooth cloth." Mature, ripe flax was suitable only for matting and ropes. During the New Kingdom, fringing, pleating, and varying the weave of the linen was seen. White or off white were the most common colors for garments. Clothing could be bleached in the sun or with natron, the chemical used in mummification. Linen does not dye well. Egyptians had dyes available for the colors red, blue, yellow, brown, and a dull purple. The famous royal purple which the Near East Phoenicians wore does not seem to have been available in Egypt. By the 18th Dynasty small amounts of colored cloth were manufactured—but mainly for royal use.

■ Cleanliness

Since ancient Egyptians valued cleanliness, all bathed at least once a day in water from the Nile. The wealthy even had showers in their homes. They would stand in a flat stone tray that emptied into an underground waste jar while servants poured water over them. Priests were expected to bathe four times a day. This cleanliness extended to undergarments. Egyptians wore a triangular linen cloth with two ends tied around the waist from the back; the third point was brought between the legs and tied to the other two. They had more of these than any other article of clothing and washed them frequently. Tutankhamon had about 100 of these in his tomb! Obviously having enough clean underwear was a concern in the afterlife.

■ Male clothing

Egyptian men of all social levels wore kilts that reached the knee, rectangles of cloth folded around the body and tied at the waist or fastened with a kind of buckle. The Pharaoh wore a special kind of kilt called a shendyt. Men also wore shawls or cloaks. In Egyptian art, women were shown from Old Kingdom to Ptolemaic times wearing ankle length sheath dresses with straps over their shoulders. Clothing found in tombs suggests the sheath dress also may have had long sleeves. The wealthier the wearer, the finer, softer, and sheerer the fabric. Another everyday type of gown was a simple rectangle of fabric wrapped once around the body, then half again around to tie over one shoulder. Both men and women of high status shaved their heads and wore elaborate wigs and beaded collars and makeup. Men shaved their faces and wore artificial beards. Queen Hatshepsut, "His Majesty, Herself," wore a false beard on ceremonial occasions. Pharaohs were often shown in statues wearing the cloth nemes or khat headdress.

■ Footwear

Ancient Egyptians often went barefoot, but quarrymen and other workers received sandals as part of their pay. Travelers wore sandals as well. Custom required removing footwear in the presence of a person of higher rank, making wearing sandals a social statement. Sandals were made from either inexpensive reeds or grasses, or from more costly leather. Leather sandals were often gilded, painted, and beaded. At least one pharaoh went to the afterlife with solid gold sandals, which must have been rather awkward and heavy to walk in—if he ever actually wore them. In the New Kingdom one style had the toe of the sandal curled up and attached to the ankle strap, requiring the wearer to learn a new way to walk!

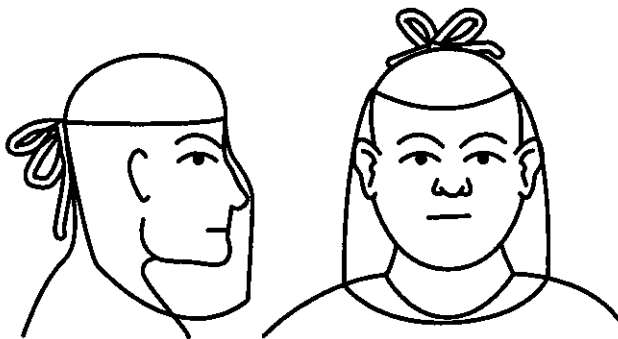
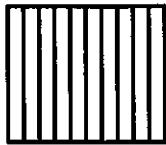
■ Other Egyptians

Children, servants, boatmen, entertainers and athletes were often shown in Egyptian art without clothing, or with only a belt or loincloth. Whether this is an indication of their lowly place in Egyptian society or how they actually were dressed is unknown. Children were shown at times with clothing imitating adult wear. Even when shown completely naked, the difference between a child of high status and a servant was apparent, for the children wore jewelry and had their heads shaved except for the sidelock of hair, the "lock of Horus."

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CLOTHING - 2

■ Jewelry

Ancient Egyptian men and women loved jewelry and wore as much as they could afford. Both Egyptian men and women wore necklaces, bracelets, arm bands, and rings. Jewelry had symbolic meanings for luck and religious purposes. Amulets were worn in life as well as after death. Egyptians believed these charms had magical properties to protect the body from evil or bring good luck. For example, children often wore small fish ornaments in their hair. The Egyptians believed these ornaments protected children from accidents in the Nile.

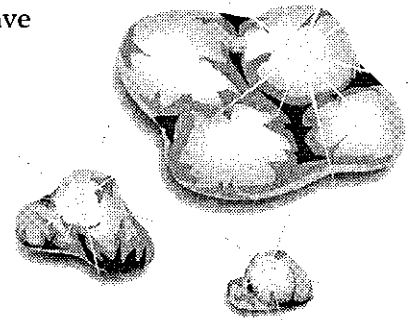


■ Stones

Favorite stones were blue lapis lazuli, red carnelian, purple amethyst, green feldspar, and greenish-blue turquoise. Lapis lazuli was expensive, but a cheap substitute was called Faience. Faience is a self-glazing ceramic. It was made by mixing copper ore and silica (sand), natron, water, and other ingredients to make a colored glazed ceramic that was then fired at high temperature. It was used for inlays, beads, figurines, amulets, dishes and bowls.

■ Gold

"Gold was the skin of the gods." Since all gold belonged to the pharaoh, any gold jewelry would either have been given away by him or made out of gold stolen from tombs. Poor people would have worn bracelets, earrings, and anklets of semiprecious beads, copper, and shells.



■ Nome Assignment:

To be a member of your nome, you will not be required to shave your head, wear a wig, or go naked. You are required to make a khat to go under your uraeus or nekhbet that will put the final touches on your appearance as an ancient Egyptian.

1. Decide as a nome **what color cloth** you will use for your khat. Striped material is recommended. Perhaps one member will be responsible to bring the cloth to the class.
2. Each member needs a piece of cloth 28"x28."
3. Tie the cloth behind the head, covering the face as if you are a bandit hiding your face.
4. Flip the cloth covering your face up over the top of your head until it hangs down the back.
5. Smooth the top of the khat and lay the front corners over your shoulders.
6. Put on your uraeus or nekhbet over the khat.

■ *Now be sure you "walk like an Egyptian!"*